DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 252 136 HE 017 973

AUTHOR Travaglini, Joseph
TITLE Instructional Delivery in a Prison Education Program.
PUB DATE Nov 84
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Advising; *Bachelors Degrees; *Correctional Education; Degree Requirements; Distance Education; Higher Education; Independent Study; Lecture Method; *Nontraditional Students; *Prisoners; *Prison Libraries; Program Descriptions; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Central Michigan University

ABSTRACT

A prison education program that provides inmates the opportunity to complete the requirements for a bachelor's degree at Central Michigan University is described. Since 1976, more than 100 incarcerated students have enrolled, and nearly 40 have graduated with a bachelor of science degree. Students may major in either management and supervision, or community service. The prison education program provides the upper-divisional requirements for a degree; a community college has been offering an on-site associate degree program. Students fulfill at least the 30 credit "residency" through university classes taken at the reformatory or by independent study. In addition to six courses taught at the prison by university faculty members, programmed self-instructional packages are available. Many of the packages involve use of audiocassette taped lectures. The subject matter specialist, usually an instructor on campus who teaches the course, is available by telephone for assistance. Eight years of experience with the program has demonstrated that classroom instruction is most preferred and successful in terms of student completion. Information is included on: conditions affecting program operations, credit for experiential learning, academic advisement, library services, and employment assistance. (SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED252136

INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY IN A PRISON EDUCATION PROGRAM

Joseph Travaglini

School of Extended Learning
Central Michigan University
Mt. Pleasant, Michigan 48859

November 1984

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Joseph Travaglini

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

HE017973

ABSTRACT

INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY IN A PRISON EDUCATION PROGRAM

Supreme Court Chief Justice Burger has called for alternatives to the prison as a "warehouse" of human beings. This paper describes an eight year old Prison Education Program that provides prison residents with a rare opportunity to complete the requirements for a Bachelor's degree during their incarceration. Included are descriptions and discussion of the Program, conditions affecting its operation, delivery of instruction, and other major features, such as library services, experiential learning, and employment assistance.

INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY IN A PRISON EDUCATION PROGRAM

by

Joseph Travaglini

Central Michigan University

In 1974 Central Michigan University established an externalized bachelor's degree program to serve persons in Michigan who are either geographically or socioeconomically isolated from traditional college study. Through a newly created unit called the Individualized Degree Program, the University sought to provide opportunities for persons who have been unable to attend classroom based programs to complete undergraduate degree requirements through flexibly scheduled and self-instructional learning activities without need to commute to campus.

Shortly after the Program began, it became evident that incarcerated individuals constituted a population that could be served under the program's criteria. These persons have not been able to attend regular on-campus classes or to meet university residency requirements during incarceration. Thus, since 1976 when a modest number of residents were admitted to the bachelor's degree completion program, more than 100 incarcerated students have enrolled of whom nearly 40 have graduated so far with a Bachelor of Science from Central Michigan University. The primary location for the program has been the Michigan Reformatory at Ionia, a maximum security institution housing approximately 700 young offenders. The Reformatory is approximately sixty-two miles from the University campus at Mt. Pleasant and is one of three major correctional facilities in Ionia.

General Description of Prison Education Program

Admission to Central Michigan's Prison Education Program at Ionia is limited to students' desiring to complete undergraduate degree requirements. Therefore, in addition to meeting the academic requirements or demonstrating ability to complete a University degree with an overall grade point average of 2.0 or higher, a student must provide evidence showing that they have completed either the requirements for an associate's degree, or 60 semester hours of prior college work. The Prison Education Program focus, then, is to provide the upper divisional requirements for the baccalaureate degree.

Because no tuition is charged to the incarcerated student, he is strongly encouraged to apply for federal financial aid either through veteran's benefits, guaranteed loans, or the Basic Grant Program. Incarcerated students are eligible for these programs despite the persistent, and at times somewhat successful, efforts in Washington, D.C. to severely curtail the eligibility. Revenue received by Central Michigan from student financial aid sources is used to partially defray program costs. However, approximately one-half of the total program cost is subsidized by University funds as part of its commitment to the Program.

The Prison Education Program leads to a Bachelor of Science degree with the possibility of majors in either management and supervision, or community service. Like every Central Michigan undergraduate degree, the prison degree program requires a minimum of 124 semester credit hours of work, 30 of which must be University sponsored credit. However, students actually fulfill at least the 30 credit "residency" through University classes taken at the Reformatory or by independent study arranged through the University.

Scheduling of course offerings at the Reformatory is designed to provide students with course work options that will enable them to earn at least the 30 credit hour University requirement, a 36 credit hour requirement for the major, and/or a 40 hour baccalaureate level course requirement.

Conditions of Program Operation

In order to provide an educational program in most Michigan prisons, a number of conditions must be taken into account. Perhaps the most favorable condition is recognition by the State of the importance of education and training in prisons. Every incarcerated individual is provided with an opportunity to complete high school diploma requirements and to receive as much as two additional years of postsecondary training or education. Therefore, at most large correctional centers, rehabilitation really encompasses an educational establishment that provides preparation for high school completion and two years of community college work. Prison admission counselors readily concede that these education and training programs provide almost the only significant rehabilitation activity at the institutions.

At the Michigan Reformatory and two other facilities in Ionia, a two year community college has been offering an on-site Associate of Arts degree program since 1972. An entire wing of the Reformatory has been converted to classroom and library space. Central Michigan was fortunate to be able to graft its baccalaureate degree completion program onto the two year college effort which has served and graduated significant numbers of incarcerated students. Classroom and meeting space has been made available to the University along with student access to the library.

Less conducive to education is the custodial nature of the prisons, a reality outsiders must face in doing business in the environment. Therefore, operation of the degree completion program has been adapted to the numerous and absolute requirements of the prison. For example, faculty members who teach at a prison site must first be cleared and receive an orientation before they can face a class. Classes must be scheduled well in advance during times allotted by the prison administration. Moreover, little can be done by the University about student class absence brought about by sudden transfers or discipline matters.

Two events dramatize the vulnerability of the Program to sudden changes in conditions. First, in May 1981 all activity at the Michigan Reformatory was suspended for nearly five months as the result of a lockdown caused by serious rioting. Then, two years later, on-site class operation was adversely affected by job actions by guards unhappy about prison employment conditions, layoffs and drastic state budget cuts.

Another condition that faces operation of the program stems from an uneven participation of the campus faculty in course teaching at Ionia. The courses are taught on an overload basis and require frequent commuting of 124 miles to and from Ionia. Some faculty find the overload prospect and multiple trips to the teaching site too demanding in time and energy. Others, especially women members, are fearful of personal security threats in the prison classroom. A significant number of faculty members do not believe that teaching felons is a desirable social goal and prefer not to participate. Therefore, the classes that <u>are</u> offered on-site are those for whom a faculty member, either from campus or an approved adjunct person, can be recruited.

To date, more than 30 individuals from Central Michigan or other surrounding colleges have taught nearly 60 classes, chiefly at the Michigan Reformatory. Six of the instructors are women. These individuals have shown either a curiosity about teaching in a prison environment or feel a deep commitment to working with prisoners.

With regard to security, only prison students are allowed to be in the colleges area which is relatively removed from the rest of the facility. One guard is assigned to oversee activity; however, there are frequent periods when no guard is available. Nevertheless, there have been no serious security problems. Also, no Central Michigan prison student was known to be involved in the 1981 riots. It appears that these students are covetous of their frequent contacts with persons from the "outside" and want not to jeopardize that interaction.

Instructional Delivery at the Prison

At the inception of the Prison Education Program, the delivery of instruction was intended to be predominately independent study. Central Michigan University has developed a form of programmed self-instruction called the Learning Package. These are packages of campus courses adapted by subject matter specialists--usually the campus course instructor--working with trained instructional developers. Most of the courses are in the management and supervision area, with a few in general education.

A Learning Package includes a course study guide which leads the student step-by-step toward mastery of course objectives. Texts and other printed material use are integrated into the course packages. Many of the packages involve use of audiocassette taped lectures.

Tests of student proficiency are given at the end of course segments and are administered by a proctor identified at the location of the student. Proctors are either identified by the University or the student with University approval. The role of the proctor is to administer pre-prepared tests to a student, to grade them and disclose the results to the student, and, if necessary, to provide the student with advice on areas that need review. If a student taking a test fails to meet the acceptable mastery level, the proctor directs him to come back for a re-test after reviewing the unit material again. Some of the courses require essay or short answer examinations, case studies and projects which must be mailed directly to the campus faculty member, or "tutor," for grading.

When learning package courses are used, students proceed at their own pace to complete the reading assignments and exercises and give evidence of mastery on end-of-unit tests as they work through the course study guide. The subject matter specialist, usually an instructor on campus who teaches the course, is available by telephone for assistance.

The original plan to utilize learning packages extensively in the prisons was made for two major reasons: First: incarcerated students would be able to work undisturbed by the real and potential disruptions of prison life; and, secondly, the problems of offering classroom courses off-campus would be minimized such as scheduling, faculty recruitment, travel costs, overload and burnout problems, and the high cost of off-campus teaching.

The model of a bachelor's degree completion program emphasizing independent study and affording maximum mobility and flexibility for the student ran into problems at the outset:

First, it failed to reckon adequately with the environment of the prison which is both distracting and demoralizing. Some students failed to complete the learning packages because of motivation problems. More often, students did not complete the package courses because they would suddenly be transferred to another facility, obtain release or parole, lose the materials, have them stolen, or simply have them confiscated by guards as retribution.

Secondly, students complained that learning packages did not provide them with the interaction they got with instructors and other students in a classroom.

Finally, administering learning package tests through a proctoring arrangement presented serious logistical and security problems.

Therefore, the learning package and correspondence courses are now used when they serve to fill out program requirements or when courses cannot be presented in a classroom. In addition, they are used by individual students who are close to completion, but have been reassigned to a facility where they are academically isolated and otherwise unable to proceed.

Since 1980, the principal instructional delivery format has been on-site classes. At one point, classes were offered not only at the Reformatory, but at two other correctional facilities in Ionia. However, in order to provide courses taught by instructors at the prison location and faced with drastic cuts in resources both at the Prison and University, we have offered fewer courses per year. Presently, six courses are available annually. Student choice is somewhat constrained and progress slowed. Nevertheless, eight years of experience with the Prison Education Program has demonstrated that classroom interaction is most preferred and successful in terms of student completion.

Credit for Experiential Learning

As has been discussed above, Central Michigan University's Prison Education Program is geared to student completion of bachelor's degree requirements in either management and supervision or community service at the Michigan Reformatory. Degree requirements may be partially fulfilled by students' completing classwork, self-instructional learning packages, or correspondence courses at the Reformatory.. Another option is available to the more mature prison student and bears mention here.

All Individualized Degree Program students are offered the opportunity to earn credit for competencies and skills developed through life experiences. This option has been largely not used by prison students, but a small number of the students, particularly the Vietnam veterans, have prepared portfolios of their prior working or training experiences in which they have developed academically relevant knowledge and skills and received college credit upon evaluation by University faculty readers. Any such credits awarded may be applied as evidence of completion of a program requirement.

Academic Advisement

For all prison education students an academic advisor coordinates the development of academic program plans, assigning credits to the appropriate degree requirement, recommending new course work and generally overseeing progress toward completion. The academic program plan is a key part of each student's involvement in the program. As the plan evolves, it serves as the basis for tracking academic progress and certifying program completion. Thus, the advisor's role in the Prison Education Program is indispensable.

An advisor will meet periodically with students at the prison site. However, follow-up is frequently done by mail.

Library Services

At the time the degree completion program began at Ionia, the community college prison extension maintained a small library for use by its students. In order to accommodate the requirements of upper level courses, Central Michigan University purchased additional books, periodicals and reference materials and donated them for use in the library as needed by both the community college and Central Michigan students.

However, students at the Reformatory do not have unlimited access to the library. They must either be "called out" by college personnel or need to state a reason for going to the library. The library site is used by Central Michigan's part-time, on-site coordinator for learning package test proctoring or small group tutorials.

In addition to the library at the Reformatory, Central Michigan University has established a reference library service which is available to all its extended learning students (these include approximately 8,000 students in master's and bachelor's degree programs at approximately 40 sites throughout the United States). The reference service is available on a WATS telephone line at no charge to students. Prison students who need to prepare papers or perform research required in their courses have access to a Campus Reference Librarian and receive the books and reference materials through the mail. Prison officials have not objected to having reference materials sent in; however, they are skittish about hard-bound volumes and the potential they

provide for smuggling. Therefore, Central Michigan librarians have limited materials sent to soft-bound books and papers.

On-Campus Completion

Six students, to date, who began their programs at the Michigan Reformatory have subsequently come to the Mt. Pleasant campus to complete their degree requirements upon release. Efforts are made to arrange their transition from prison to campus. For example, an effort is made to provide for campus orientation with assistance in arranging financial aid, housing, jobs and course registrations.

It is anticipated that with prison overcrowding conditions, the greater prospect for early release, and the reduced number of course opportunities offered at the prison location more students who are released will avail themselves of the opportunity to complete their degree requirements on campus. Moreover, it is expected that increasing numbers of these students will go on to graduate study at Central Michigan University and elsewhere.

Employment Placement

Prison education students are encouraged to utilize the employment placement services of the University. In addition, faculty members and program administrators will furnish references for students seeking jobs upon release from incarceration.

An effort to follow-up on students who have completed degree requirements and have been paroled or released is underway. While a college degree does not alter the stigma of a prison record and the recent economic recession has

not improved the employment chances of persons who have served time, there are two observations that can now be made: First, recidivism among students who have been in the Central Michigan program has been very low; and, secondly, evidence so far suggests that those who have been released from prison have managed to obtain some kind of employment.

Conclusion

Chief Justice Burger has repeatedly called for alternatives to the prison as a "warehouse" of human beings. His observation that the prison environment represents an enormous waste of talent and resources which could be put to better use is right on target. The trend toward seeking to deter crime by imposing minimum mandatory prison sentences leads only to the need to build more costly "warehouses" to accommodate more inmates. What is needed is a view of the potential for providing offenders, most of whom will be released eventually, with a way back to a useful role in society.

The traditional belief that prisoners can only be trained to make license plates or furniture minimizes and frustrates the aspirations of these persons. Many of them look toward education to understand better why and where they went wrong. Most of them dream the same dreams as other Americans about becoming professionals, artists, businessmen, poets and writers. At the very least, Central Michigan's Prison Education Program seeks to address the quality of the human condition in these institutions.

References

J. Travaglini, "Serving New Audiences Through an External Degree Program." Abstract in Resources in Education, ERIC INDEX. ED 185 610, September, 1980.

_____, "Prison Education: Picking Up Where Others Failed" with Martha H. Brown and Hambir G. Phadtare, in the University and the Inner City: A Redefinition of Relationships, ed. W. Franklin Spikes (New York: D.C. Heath and Company, 1980).

_____, "Development of an Individualized Educational Delivery System Within Prison Walls," in Personalized Instruction in Education Today, eds. Sherman, Ruskin and Lazar (San Francisco: S.F. Press, Inc., 1978).

Michigan Department of Corrections, Dimensions 1977-78: Annual Report, (Lansing: State of Michigan, 1978).